



SYRO MALABAR EPARCHY OF GREAT BRITAIN

Pastoral Letter 11

Relying on God's grace and protection, Mar Joseph Srampickal, Bishop of the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain, writing to all Priests, Religious and the Faithful.

THE SEASON OF THE HARVEST OF FAITH

Dearly beloved Priests, Religious and Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It was on the 16th of July 2016, on the feast day of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the Holy Father Pope Francis erected the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain and appointed me as its first Bishop. Today on its fourth anniversary, I am delighted to write to the community of the faithful, thanking God for the protection and intercession of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

During 'Kaitha' (Summer), the harvest season of the liturgical calendar, we pray to the Lord to enrich the Church by living a life anchored on faith and prayer. The Church grows through the lives of individuals who bear witness to Christ in this world. Church exhorts us to examine our life of faith and to bear fruit through the renewal of the mind and heart.

Jesus expects from us a life of faith built on rock (Luke 6:48) and bearing fruit at the appropriate time (Mathew 21:41). Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Anything that does not proceed from faith is sin (Romans 14:23). The Word of God describes Mary, the embodiment of faith, as 'Blessed is she who believed' (Luke 1:45). Those who believed would have an urge to serve.

It was during this time of Coronavirus that the faithful, especially those working in the healthcare field made a dedication of a steadfast life of faith. I thank God for all of you and I congratulate you for being able to share your faith even in the midst of life-threatening crises, without complaint or fear. During the lockdown, when the Church doors were forced to shut, you converted your homes into churches and I am sure that you have lived a life of faith and increased fellowship through reading and listening to the Word of God, praying the Liturgy of the Hours and the Rosary. I am pleased that you have been able to make good use of the online prayer services broadcasted from our Eparchy. As the churches reopen in the near future, may the Holy Spirit bless you, the faithful, to attend Holy Qurbana, Sacraments and other services with a growing zeal.

Faith is a divine virtue. When the heart is left to be moulded by the grace of the Gospel that transfigures, it is man's adherence to God (CCC 150). Anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him (1 Cor.6:17). The word of God reminds us: "Cursed are those who trust

in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord.” (Jeremiah 17:5). Faith offers us the enlightened foretaste of the heavenly experience of seeing God face to face and of eternal life, in this worldly life itself (CCC163). ‘Faith is the supreme virtue and the origin of all other virtues’ (Pope Leo XIII).

The Church teaches that the disciple of Christ should not only remain in his faith and live according to it, but confess it and bear witness to it with conviction, and share it. We must all be willing to profess Christ before people and to follow Him on the path of the cross in the midst of the constant persecution of the church (CCC 2471). Along with Jesus who sacrificed himself for the atonement of the sins of the world, the Saints and Martyrs, we must be empowered to atone for our sins.

Let us imitate St. Paul who endured everything not to put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:12). He suffered it all in order to take part in the gospel and for the sake of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:23). St. Paul punished and enslaved his body so that, after proclaiming to others he himself should not be disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:27). The one who indulges in pleasure is dead even while he lives (1 Timothy 5:6). When we indulge in luxuries, we live contrary to the gospel and to Christ. We should find favour with Christ by fasting, prayer and penance.

It is time that we must pray that our faith may be increased (Luke 17:5) and to work hard for it. St. Ignatius of Antioch teaches that “May baptism be your shield and your faith be an armour”. The first movement towards salvation is faith. “Hope and repentance follows faith” teaches St. Clement of Alexandria. So the words of John the Baptist should rebuild our life of faith. Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’ (Luke 3:8). Jesus said; ‘You will all perish unless you repent’ (Luke 13:3,5) and ‘The one who believes and is baptised will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned’ (Mark 16:16).

The faithful are not the unfortunate ones who have hoped in Christ, only for this life (1 Cor. 15:19). For we who have gained easy access to the immortal kingdom of our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ, must make every effort to support the faith we received with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love (2Peter 1:5-7). We should have unwavering dedication and hard work of an athlete in order to enter through the narrow door of faith (Luke 13:24).

Faith without a mission spirit is never faith. Pope Francis reminds us that faith is a vigour that must be transmitted from us to the others. The parents, youngsters and children of our Eparchy are very creative. Their skills should be used for evangelisation through the social media platforms.

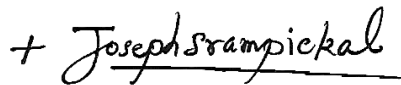
The criteria of faith are not a set of preconceived notions or presumed presuppositions. Antiquity, financial security, family heritage or social status do not form the basis of faith. ‘See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ’ (Colossians: 2:8). The faithful are divine personalities who are heirs to eternal life promised by Christ (1 John 2:25) and are nurtured by the word of God and the Holy Eucharist in His body the Church, that was redeemed by Him. They are not the ones to attain darkness and judgement by walking the wide paths that God hates and the law forbids.

There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death (Proverbs 14:12). So our convictions must be profound. Do not be discouraged by suffering and illness, but may the intercession of St. Alphonsa of the Immaculate Conception, the patroness of our Eparchy, who prayed with faith during suffering: 'Purify my heart, consume me with the burning love for you and make me one with You', strengthen all those who are in crisis and help them move forward with hope.

True faith not only dedicates oneself to God but also gives entry to His body, the Church (The Door of Faith 1). This is a loving reminder that through the Church, all must be willing to ignite our faith through the Holy Qurbana, the worship of the Church which is to be believed, celebrated and lived and through the reading and listening of the Word of God, Sacraments, Liturgy of the Hours, Rosary and acts of Charity.

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Yours in Our Lord and Our God,

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Mar Joseph Srampickal

Bishop, Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain

Preston, 16/07/2020

NB: 1. This Pastoral letter must be read in all Syro-Malabar Qurbana Centres/Parish during the celebration of the Holy Qurbana before 31st August 2020.

2. Those who wish to take part in the online training programs organised by the Eparchy under the guidance of eminent personalities in order to grow deeper in a life of faith, please enrol their names before the 31st of August on the email address: secretary@csmegb.org.